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25 August 1952Soviet note on Germany reiterates previous stand

The Soviet note of 23 August reveals no basic change in the Kremlin's policy toward Germany as expressed in previous notes this year. The USSR continues to stress its interpretation of the Potsdam Agreement as the only acceptable basis for a German settlement. It proposes to call four-power discussions on Germany by October at the latest, but will consider the problems surrounding free elections only in conjunction with the preparation of a peace treaty, formation of an all-German government, and the withdrawal of occupation forces.

The note is intended to appeal to both East and West Germany. For the first time in the series of exchanges, the proposal is made that parliamentary groups from East and West Germany investigate electoral conditions. The note caters to German nationalism in condemning the "special rights" given to the Western powers by the Bonn Agreement. It is also intended to attract those elements in Western Europe who favor further negotiations with the USSR before finalizing the German contractual agreements.

The timing of the note shortly before the opening of the Bundestag on 4 September suggests that it is aimed at delaying ratification of the contractual agreements. This aim will be served also by the announced intention to begin the four-power meeting no later than October.

The USSR can make no substantial concessions to advance its aims in all of Germany without threatening its control of East Germany and its program of sovietization. Consequently, it is reduced to reiterating its previous position with only minor variations. Nevertheless, it has ostensibly accepted the Western proposal that conditions for holding elections be discussed, and may be expected to stress this in its propaganda while soft peddling the conditions which it continues to insist upon for holding talks. The Kremlin doubtless realizes that its proposals will be unacceptable to the West but, having agreed to talks -- on its own terms of course -- now hopes to place the onus for refusal upon the West.

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